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WORLD-POLITICS.

LONDON: ST. PETERSBURG.

LONDON, *February, 1907.*

IN issuing, on February 5th, the usual letter to his followers, summoning them to attend the opening of Parliament, the Prime Minister made use of a significant phrase. He announced that "the attention of the House of Commons will at once be called to matters of grave importance." The adjective "grave" marked a departure from the ordinary formula that could not fail to strike the country. It was felt to bear a special meaning, a meaning that was emphasized by the fact that, not Parliament as a whole, but the House of Commons alone, was designated as the body whom it most concerned. In the letter from the Government leader in the House of Lords advising Liberal Peers that Parliament was to meet on February 12th, a letter that was despatched simultaneously with the Premier's message to his supporters in the Commons, no mention was made of any "matters of grave importance." The inference was immediately drawn that the Prime Minister was revolving in his mind a policy that closely touched the prestige and utility of the House of Commons, and touched them primarily in their relation to the Upper Chamber. That this inference was correct I do not question; but the practical meaning to be read into it is more than, writing on the eve of the meeting of Parliament, I am able to forecast. This much, however, may safely be said—that the question of the House of Lords is now rapidly moving to the first place among English issues, and that the Government have definitely resolved to deal with it.

The subject is far too vast a one, and far too intricate, to be treated otherwise than scrappily in such a communication as this. Even to present its leading features would need more pages than

I have lines at my disposal. A hereditary Chamber embedded in an otherwise democratic Constitution is an obvious anachronism, but not on that account to be condemned except by those—their number, I fear, is increasing nowadays—who look upon politics as a branch of mathematics, and who set a greater store by the symmetry of political arrangements than by their practical convenience and adequacy. Englishmen, who are still inclined to pride themselves on their contempt for mere theories in the work of government, would not easily be wrought up into attacking an ancient institution merely because it failed to satisfy the fancied requirements of logic. Moreover, the House of Lords is not an unpopular assembly. There is not, I should judge, anything like as much feeling against it as obtains amongst Americans against the United States Senate. Individually, its members have an influence and a position that are accepted and approved by the people, and that draw their strength from the deep and rich soil of sanctified customs and traditions. Collectively, in their legislative capacity, they have opposed reforms but have rarely defeated them, and no charge of a tyrannous or unscrupulous use of their powers can be sustained against them.

The great political inconvenience of the Upper House in its present form is that it is overwhelmingly Tory. When a Tory Government is in power, the Lords, except as a mere ratifying Chamber, virtually cease to exist. They abandon their privilege of revision. Their “suspensory veto” is itself suspended. They will swallow any measure, however distasteful, so long as it bears the Tory label. But, directly a Liberal Government comes into office, the Lords awake from their stupor of inaction and assert themselves. No matter how strong the Government may be, they claim the right to reject or amend its proposals at will. A measure such as the Trades Disputes Bill they will pass, not because it has behind it a great popular backing, but because it is almost entirely a commercial question with which their own peculiar interests are not crucially concerned. Besides, to pass it may be a good move in the party game. But other Liberal measures that more intimately affect them as a privileged political class or as territorial magnates—measures, for instance, dealing with the land, the Church and education—they do not hesitate to throw out or to mutilate. It comes, therefore, to this—that, under a Liberal Government, the Lords only allow public

opinion to prevail when it favors measures that do not clash with their special interests. When measures are brought forward that antagonize those interests, the Lords disregard opinion and alter and reject them as they please. Thus in the last session they killed both the Plural Voting Bill and the Education Bill, though each was a measure approved of by the people at large. It is true that, by the practice of the Constitution, the Lords withdraw their opposition to any measure that is sent up to them again after a second General Election. But there are many measures—the Education Bill was one of them—which the people wish to see passed, which ought to be passed, and which yet do not warrant all the disturbance of a General Election in order to force them through the Upper House. And why, it may be asked, should a Liberal Government, just fresh from the polls, with a huge majority both in the Commons and in the country, be required to produce a certificate of two General Elections, when a Tory Government gets all it wishes with one? Is the majority only to rule effectively in Great Britain when it is a Tory majority?

Such are the questions that the Liberals are asking themselves; such is the dilemma in which they are placed. And it is a dilemma rendered all the more perplexing by the certainty that to “reform” the Lords, to make them more representative, to introduce the elective principle into their composition, to widen the area from which the Upper House is recruited, is simply to make it more powerful and at the same time to leave the balance of parties unredressed. The present Ministry has already seen the principal measure of its first session founder in the Lords. There is a prospect, there is more than a prospect, that the principal measure of its second session, the Irish Bill, will suffer similar shipwreck; and when it comes to tackle the land question there is no chance whatever that its views and those of the Lords can be harmonized. What under these circumstances is the course for it to pursue? To dissolve at once and appeal to the country on the general issue of the House of Lords is a policy more violent than bold. The Lords, so far, have only thrown out one of the Government’s great measures; it is only thirteen months since we had a General Election; to have another one now is practically to admit the right of the Lords to force a dissolution whenever they choose; the experi-

ment of whether a Liberal Government can do its appointed work with the Lords in possession of their present powers has not yet been fully tried; above all, the country needs educating on the many and difficult issues which are involved. These arguments are decisive against an immediate dissolution. On the other hand, the Government cannot go on as though nothing had happened, nor can it submit to seeing legislative effect given only to such residuum among its projects of reform as the Lords may chance to approve. Said Mr. Winston Churchill a few days ago:

"The Peers had deliberately provoked a great constitutional struggle. Every effort at compromise and conciliation (in the matter of the Education Bill) had been insultingly rejected, and the Commons in the heyday of their strength and youth would take up the challenge without hesitation. . . . The Houses of Parliament would meet upon conditions of war; and it was their, the Commons', business to come to an understanding at once with those lordly persons and to show without delay that it was the House of Commons and not the House of Lords which would be master in the second Parliament of King Edward VII. No doubt, the end of such a conflict must be a general election. But there were many things to be done before they came to that. They had to pass a couple of good Radical Budgets; they had to formulate and develop their policy upon the land question; they had to educate the country upon the constitutional issues which were raised, and bring all progressive forces into the line of battle against a common enemy. The General Election would come soon enough for everybody. The battle of Lords and Commons had first to be fought out in Parliament."

The meaning of this, and of many other declarations by Ministers in a somewhat similar sense, I take to be that the Government intends to regulate its policy and strategy from now onwards by constant reference to the supreme issue of Lords *vs.* Commons. The negative side of its tactics will be to send up Bill after Bill, and to pile up a case against the Lords on the strength of each Bill the Lords reject or mutilate. But side by side with this manœuvre—which, though an easy one to prescribe, is a difficult one to carry out, for it asks a skilful and far-sighted selection of the measures that are to be placed in the front line of attack, and it asks also more sacrifice and restraint among the various sections of the Liberal party than they usually display—there is to be waged a direct and aggressive campaign in the House and in the country against the over-riding of the popular Chamber. "A way will be found," said

the Prime Minister at the end of last session, "whereby the wishes of the people may be made to prevail." It may be useful to compile a rough estimate of the resources of the Government and of the House of Commons in the emergency that confronts them. There is an immediate and an ulterior problem. The immediate one is to deal with the situation created by the rejection of the Education Bill. This may, perhaps, be effected by means of a simple Bill providing that no school shall be deemed to be a public elementary school which is not under full public control, absolving the teachers in such schools from all religious tests and vesting their appointment and dismissal in the local education authority. Again, the House of Commons has the undisputed and undivided control over the expenditure of all public money. If it were to refuse to pay Government grants to schools not under public control, it would seriously cripple the Church of England schools and might thus force the compromise it has failed to secure by negotiation.

So much for the specific and minor issue. It is, however, the larger, vaguer and infinitely more complex problem, of which the fate of the Education Bill is but a part, that most engages speculation. How can the present Government give effect to the wishes of its supporters against the will of the House of Lords? It possesses already the vast power of finance, a power which, if remorselessly used in a struggle between the two Houses, might of itself decide the conflict. A Ministry that exercises a sole jurisdiction over the kinds of taxes that are to be raised and over every detail of their allocation and expenditure, has a weapon to hand, if it cares or has the courage to use it, of incalculable potency. Then again, by a device which the House of Representatives has sometimes employed against the Senate, it is always possible to embody legislative provisions in the clauses of a money bill. The creation, or threatened creation—the threat in such cases is usually sufficient—of a number of new Peers to overcome the opposition of the Tory Lords is a third expedient that the Commons may, if they choose, adopt. But neither of these latter stratagems has the directness or the candor befitting the treatment of a great constitutional issue. Lord Crewe said a day or two ago, and with perfect truth, that the people of this country do not like to see one party in the political game playing with loaded dice. That is the position which the

Tories, through the use and abuse of their overwhelming numerical strength in the Upper House, at present occupy. But the people of this country have no wish to see the Liberals adopting the subterfuges and trickeries they denounce in their opponents; and a policy of legislating through money Bills and of creating Peers by the fifties, besides shelving instead of solving the essential question, would make a disagreeable impression of pettiness, if not of quackery. Heroic remedies are for heroic crises and at present there is no crisis, but only an emergency, or rather a condition of static inequality which circumstances have somewhat aggravated and which ought to be rectified. The best and most dignified way of facing it seems to be that of a series of resolutions which would precisely formulate the issues between the two Houses and provide, what is sadly needed, a basis for rational discussion. That was the course followed in 1860 when the Peers reimposed the paper duties which the Commons had remitted. Lord Palmerston brought forward three resolutions in the Lower House for the purpose of telling the Peers, as he put it, that the step they had taken in reenacting a tax which had been repealed by the Commons "was a very good joke for once, but they must not give it to us again." The Peers took the hint then; they might conceivably see fit to take it again. If Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman were to introduce resolutions stigmatizing the partisan character of the Upper House, reaffirming the supremacy of the House of Commons as the organ of the nation's will, and limiting the veto of the Peers to the duration of a single session, their effect, while devoid of the force of law—for the Peers, naturally enough, would decline to accept them—would at least have the virtue of a serious and impressive warning. If the warning were disregarded the next step would probably be the incorporation of the resolutions in a Bill. If the Bill in its turn were rejected, there would then be nothing for it but a General Election, fought out on the specific issue of curtailing the prerogatives of the House of Lords. I do not say that such is, indeed, the double-barrelled programme which official Liberalism contemplates; but among unofficial Liberals there is a very strong sentiment in its favor, nor would it lack support from the people. What, at any rate, may be safely assumed is that the question, once definitely raised, cannot and will not be dropped until it has been carried to a clear and comprehensive issue.

ST. PETERSBURG, *February, 1907.*

AT last the elections have begun, and the most sceptical subjects of the Tsar are now convinced that the Government is endeavoring in earnest to introduce representative institutions into the country. Excitement, therefore, is intense at meetings and in public places, for this time all political parties and factions are taking an active part in the struggle. Even the revolutionists have decided, without abandoning their deeds of blood, to record their votes for the enemies of the Government. But the enthusiasm which is noticeable in various parts of the Empire is fitful. Thus many hate to put themselves out and go to the voting-booth on a frosty day; but there are exceptions, and the exceptions are generally the adversaries of the Government and of the *régime*.

The first elections that took place in the towns were primary; that is to say, they were not for members of the Duma, but for delegates who will contribute later on to return Deputies to the Duma. On the first day, the frost, which was intense, kept many voters away; but, of those who braved the cold, the most part were staunch supporters of the Socialist, the Revolutionary or the Democratic party. From the villages where the peasants have since chosen their men of confidence, a different story has come. The semiofficial telegraphic agency describes the selected delegates as Moderates or Conservatives. But only those believe this who hope the tale is true. My own forefeeling—it is hardly more than that—is that the country has sent, and will send, representatives of the extreme Monarchist and the Revolutionary parties, and also a mass of peasants who may be swayed by either.

If the Duma wisely narrows down its aggressive action to constitutional attacks on the Stolypin Cabinet, it will have the Government at a serious disadvantage. For, however warmly one may defend the monarchical system as the most suited for the Russian people until they are better fitted for self-government, one cannot but admit that the present Cabinet is no longer much of a help to the monarchy. Most people regard it as a hindrance. Certain of its members have deliberately exceeded their powers, some have utilized their position for their own private benefit, while others are simply incapable of transacting the business of the nation during a revolutionary crisis. Nothing, therefore, would be easier than to upset the present Cabinet,

so long as the lever pressed is constitutional. If the Duma, instead of asking that the Tsar shall choose his advisers from the parliamentary majority, analyzes the important acts of certain of his Ministers in the broad light of day, it is virtually certain that the Crown will soon disavow the measures and dismiss the men.

One of the principal misdemeanors complained of was committed by the Ministry of the Interior, for which the Premier himself is responsible. Corn was needed by the hunger-stricken peasants of twenty-seven provinces, and the Government resolved to purchase and distribute it. This transaction, owing to its magnitude, required delicate handling; for, if it became known that the Treasury was buying a vast amount of corn to be delivered by a certain date, prices would rise proportionately or even disproportionately. To obviate this, a competent person or committee ought to have been charged with the execution of the order. Formerly, the business was confided to a competent board. But M. Stolypin, say his adversaries, needlessly altered this arrangement and handed the matter over to his own adjoint, Gurko, a man who is uncommonly able, resourceful, pushing, self-centred and haughty. Gurko, meeting a contractor whose ways reminded him of enterprising Americans, asked him whether he would buy the corn; and then, having bargained for very acceptable terms, gave him the contract and four hundred thousand dollars in advance. If this man had indeed been an enterprising American, the peasantry and the Government would have both had reason to rejoice. For it was perhaps an excellent way to get the corn cheaply and speedily. But whether the agent was also the right sort of person may be doubted. In any case the subordinate Minister had exceeded his powers and technically committed an offence, and, as the arrangement has since proved abortive, he lacks defenders. The contractor had no money of his own, no property, no commercial past, no guarantees for the future. Very soon the matter was bruited abroad by an enemy of the Government, and, as secrecy is indispensable to success in dealings of this kind, premature publicity ruined the arrangement. Doubtless it might have failed in any case. But, as a matter of fact, prices rose rapidly, the contractor could no longer purchase rye at rates which would have given him a profit, the contract could not be fulfilled and the hungry peasants suffered

as well as everybody else concerned. For a time, M. Stolypin hesitated what course to take, then he had a Commission appointed to inquire into the transaction; but, although the Committee found that M. Gurko had gone beyond his powers and must be sent for trial on this charge, the Premier has allowed him to remain in office down to this moment. Consequently, from first to last, the Premier has technically covered with his own person the policy of his subordinate and shares with him the blame for breaking the law.

Then comes another and a more serious matter. The Premier is accused of having violated the fundamental laws by restricting the franchise and depriving tens of thousands of electors of their votes. He answers that he did restrict the franchise, but without breaking the law. He conscientiously refused to alter the electoral law as it now stands, because that would, he held, be tantamount to a *coup d'état*. But immediately afterwards he caused a Department of the Senate to interpret the electoral law in a most restrictive sense, so that what he feared to take by hook, he got by crook. Whether technically he committed a misdemeanor depends upon the construction put upon the clauses of the law, but it is only fair to say that some of the Senators themselves are of opinion that the statute was violated in this case. Whether it would follow that the present elections are null and void and the Premier guilty of a punishable offence is open to discussion.

A third count against the Cabinet raises one of the most important problems of all, the finances of the Empire. The Opposition maintains that the financial policy struck out by the present Minister, M. Kokovtseff, is baleful to the country, and that the Minister himself is professionally incompetent and ethically unfit to remain at the head of his department. If this accusation were proffered by Radicals alone, one would be warranted in receiving it with mistrust; for the Opposition itself left nothing undone to ruin the finances of the Empire deliberately, perseveringly and for the sole purpose of triumphing over the partisans of the monarchy. Patriotism, therefore, which is usually presupposed as the motive of the accusers in this category of offences, cannot be assumed in the present case. But it is not only the Opposition that is dissatisfied with M. Kokovtseff. Some of the most zealous of the partisans of the Government are equally discontented with

him, on grounds which to most people will appear cogent or at least reasonable.

M. Kokovtseff's financial policy is now complained of by every one in Russia who understands the subject. The superabundance of paper currency is one of its drawbacks. There are now six hundred million dollars circulating in the form of banknotes, besides three hundred and twenty-five millions in gold and one hundred and twenty-five millions in treasury bonds which are employed as banknotes. Three years and four months ago, when Witté quitted the Finance Ministry, there were in circulation only two hundred and seventy-seven million dollars' worth of banknotes, three hundred and eighty millions in gold and fifty millions in treasury bonds. M. Kokovtseff's policy, therefore, involved the increase of money in circulation by forty-eight per cent., whereas the increase in trade has been either insignificant or *nil*. His shortsightedness necessitated a high rate of interest for the recent loans, because the time chosen for borrowing was inauspicious. And M. Kokovtseff has done nothing to better all this. He has been reposing on the laurels gained by Witté. His budget has been balanced by Witté's foreign loan; the paper notes are covered by Witté's gold; the revenue is formed of taxes levied by Witté's system. M. Kokovtseff can point to nothing of his own. Yet he could and should have adopted a series of effectual measures. The present Cabinet has evinced a marvellous degree of ingenuity in enacting laws, despite the Tsar's promise to issue no law in future without the consent of the Duma. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. It has given the peasantry considerable relief in a circuitous way, striking off their fetters and enabling them to purchase land; it has accorded liberty of conscience to millions, and in many other departments of life it has done excellent work. But in the financial domain neither the Cabinet nor the Minister has accomplished or even attempted anything. Yet nothing would have been easier than to issue a law cutting down wasteful expenditure. The amount, for instance, annually squandered on yearly or life annuities for able-bodied officials who are in receipt of fat salaries is very considerable. And it has not been lessened. Yet the main source of relief is precisely that careful economy of which the Minister seems afraid.

M. Kokovtseff has, however, abolished the annuities called "rents." In bygone times the monarch was wont to show his

recognition for services rendered by presenting the object of his favor with lands. To-day, instead of an estate, a fixed sum of money is bestowed annually for a certain time or during life. Many widows and orphans whose pensions are slender—\$500 to \$1,500 a year—receive a “rent” of as much again. Now, to these ill-starred people the loss of one-half or one-third of their slender income will be very painful indeed; and there have been bitter complaints on the subject. The gain to the country, too, is a mere trifle, from \$500,000 dollars to \$1,000,000. But the Minister is austere and inexorable—a sort of Lucius Brutus condemning his own sons to death and witnessing their execution.

At the same time, however, M. Kokovtseff has been, it is said, prolonging the annuities of certain of his friends who are in receipt of large salaries. If true, that accusation will prove damaging. And, unhappily, it is not all. M. Kokovtseff, it is further alleged—and this time the facts are apparently firmly established—has obtained for his own self an annuity of four thousand rubles, although he is receiving eighteen thousand as Finance Minister. It seems very cruel thus to enrich himself at the moment that he is heroically depriving shabby-genteel widows and pale-faced orphans of one-half or one-third of their yearly incomes. Ought the man who can do this trick to remain at the head of the finances of the Empire in a period of revolution? Is he a help to his sovereign? He has, it is further alleged, got this annuity for himself in an underhand way, through the medium of two friends, and having obtained it, he innocently said to the Premier: “Could I have refused the offer coming from his Majesty, unsolicited by me?”

There are many other counts in the indictment against M. Kokovtseff. But those which I have enumerated may stand as types. Unhappily, M. Stolypin, who is himself the soul of honor, has publicly sung the praises of his Finance Minister, and will therefore technically have to bear his share of the blame attaching to that Minister’s acts. In a word, the Opposition will have ammunition enough to batter breaches in the Cabinet and even to annihilate it, if that be the object of its attack.

One of its trump cards will be the alleged fact that the official advisers of the Crown are not the real advisers. And among the evidence is the action taken in the matter of reorganizing the fleet. An elaborate scheme was recently drafted dividing

the administration of the navy into several departments, making the chief of each one answerable for his service to the Crown only, and abolishing the post of Marine Minister. When the Marine Minister, Birileff, was summoned to a council in Tsarskoye Selo, under the chairmanship of the Emperor, to discuss the condition of the navy, he learned for the first time that such a project existed. That scheme would have abolished his office. Yet he had been, until a few weeks before, one of the court favorites, a *persona gratissima* despite grave disqualifications. "They evidently don't want me here," he murmured; and, drawing one of the consequences, he tendered his resignation. There was nothing else to do. Birileff's disgrace is a matter of indifference. What is really important is the conditions that led to it, because they still continue to prevail.

The navy reorganization scheme will go on, must go on, if Russia is ever to regain her lost position; but whether it will be tackled skilfully and carried out successfully is open to question. The new Minister is a respectable, elderly gentleman, but he is only an average naval officer and a poor administrator. The Tsar has, it is true, given him a number of relatively young admirals as assistants, but their worth is varied, some of them owing their promotion wholly to favor. Admiral Bostrem is an instance. He distinguished himself negatively during the war; and, curiously enough, he ruined the career of his chief without impairing his own. It happened in this way. Admiral Jessen, the only man who achieved any success on sea against the Japanese, came home in charge of three vessels. One of these, the "Bogatyr," was commanded by Captain Bostrem, who brought it into port in such a deplorable state that Admiral Skrydloff, whose duty it was to inspect the ships, sharply reprimanded Admiral Jessen, who immediately resigned. But Captain Bostrem had friends at court who have been active ever since, and he has just now been made Subordinate Minister with the powers of a Minister.